

Subject: End-Of-The-Year Update
December 20, 2023

The Christmas season gives us time to slow down and reflect. I did just that after the December town board meeting. I realized that meeting marked the tenth anniversary of my first swearing-in as Mayor of Highlands. It continues every day to be a humble honor to serve as mayor.

I have tried over the years to communicate with Highlanders. Fifty-two weekly newspaper articles multiplied by ten equals 520 articles. The same goes for weekly radio shows. Steve Day and I were laughing, reminiscing about all those recordings last Friday.

In the last two years, I have created a personal website where I again try to keep folks updated. At AskMayorPat.com, there are now over 100 weekly updates and special report videos available on the website. Matthew Eberz works with me each week in producing the videos, whether it is an iPhone clip from my home or office or a production shoot at a Highlands location. I appreciate Matthew's support, as well as working with Kim Lewicki, Ryan Hatchett, Brian O'Shea, and Steve Day to keep the community informed.

I am aware that some may feel that my communications straddle a fine line between being informative for the community and becoming a spin exercise by Mayor Pat. Always feel free, like the press folks do, to keep me honest and forthcoming.

Now that we have completed this year's election, folks are asking me whether I will run for another term. My response is that I have two more years in this current third term. At this halfway point, I still have work to do before I make the decision whether or not to seek re-election. To paraphrase Robert Frost, I have miles to go before I decide.

In the meantime, I see several emerging projects that we can all work together to achieve. Exactly how they will come about remains to be determined.

Please drop by the lobby of the recreation center and look at the conceptual drawing of a new playground facility. It is a wonderful concept for providing children with a fantastic space for play and exploration. Other communities like Blowing Rock and Greenville have major playground spaces, and now it is time for Highlands to have one, too. I foresee a private/public partnership emerging this year to make this project a reality.

Also, I see a public and private coalition forming to build a new facility for an after-school program for children of working families. We have a critical need for childcare in Highlands, and this facility would meet one essential part of a total childcare program. I hope the town and county can partner with the Cashiers Boys and Girls Club to make this facility and program a reality. The Boys and Girls Club is the expert in delivering after-school and summer programs like the ones we need in Highlands.

As stated in my article last week, the plateau community needs to explore how the critical workforce housing shortage can be addressed. This problem is huge, and no one entity can solve the problem. It will require the community to work together.

Finally, town staff will be very busy this year implementing the major projects that were funded by the legislature. The Dog Mountain water project should get under construction late in 2024. The pre-clarifier tank project at the water plant and the Mirror Lake dredging projects will follow after all the design and planning requirements are met. Our staff is up to the task of moving these projects forward.

It could be a very interesting and exciting year, even beyond the impending elections in November.

Merry Christmas to you and your families, and a Happy New Year to Highlands.